

National Capital Region Network: A milestone in the making

by Sybil Hood

“The network has been successful in ... pooling the limited resources of its 11 parks.”

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE’S INVENTORY and Monitoring Program is a titanic effort to develop critical information about the natural resources found within 270 parks organized into 32 monitoring networks. The National Capital Region Network is one of the first networks to receive funding to develop a comprehensive long-term monitoring plan. In 2002 the National Capital Region Network reached some key milestones and emerged as a model for how monitoring networks were envisioned to function. The network has been successful in developing partnerships with other scientific entities to undertake inventory and monitoring activities and pooling the limited resources of its 11 parks, many of which are relatively small, with limited staff and resources devoted to natural resources.

One of the year’s most important accomplishments occurred in July 2002 when the National Capital Region Network hosted a three-day monitoring workshop that was designed to further engage the scientific community. The workshop attracted more than 100 participants, representing some 28 agencies and organizations, 14 national parks, and five NPS divisions and regions. Technical input was gathered on the region’s most important resources, including air, water, geology, landscape, vegetation, wildlife, invertebrates, and threatened and endangered species. Participants prioritized the threats to these resources and identified potential vital signs to monitor ecosystem health. The information gathered during the workshop will feed into the planning process and the development of the network’s monitoring plan. Technical committees will continue to meet and build upon the momentum created by the workshop.

An inventory of the fish communities within six parks of the National Capital Region Network was implemented in 2002 by the network’s Inventory and Monitoring Program. Using the Chesapeake Watershed Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit, the National Park Service established a partnership with Dr. Richard Raesly of Frostburg State University, who surveyed habitats along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park.



NPS PHOTO BY JOHN SINCLAIR

Biological inventories of vertebrate species and vascular plants continued in 2002. The network coordinates the field research for these surveys, which are awarded primarily to partnering agencies, universities, Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units, and private contractors through competitive contracts. Bird inventories using volunteers are the exception to this model. Initiated by the National Capital Region Network, this highly successful volunteer effort provides valuable information to the parks at no cost, promotes park appreciation, and develops community support for the Inventory and Monitoring Program (see page 21).

Begun in 2001, the monitoring portion of the effort also posted progress in 2002 on the seven-step implementation plan recommended by the national Inventory and Monitoring Program. The National Capital Region Network began the process by summarizing existing information on important resources, resource threats, management issues, current and historical monitoring, and monitoring needs in the parks. A science advisory committee—composed of a resource manager from each park, regional NPS staff, and scientists from partnering agencies—was formed to provide technical input for the development of the network’s monitoring plan. Experts affiliated with other state and federal government agencies, universities, and conservation groups were invited to many of the committee’s meetings to provide additional technical expertise on an ad hoc basis.

An important part of the National Capital Region Network’s 2003 agenda includes enhancing understanding of and support for the Inventory and Monitoring Program. Network staff plan to participate in meetings related to conservation in the region, create fact sheets and newsletters, and meet with park staff who have regular contact with park visitors. Work will continue on inventory efforts and the development of the monitoring plan. In 2003 the National Capital Region Network looks forward to forging new partnerships and building upon the cooperative efforts that flourished in 2002. ■

sybil_hood@nps.gov

Biological Science Technician,
National Capital Region Network, Washington, D.C.